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Adam Bodnar
Stanisław Trociuk
Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights

Ceremony – World Justice Project award

Dear Honourable Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great honor to receive the World Justice Project award. I would like to thank the Award Committee for this honorable distinction.

I would like to dedicate this Award to Professor Karol Modzelewski, a great Polish hero, who passed away on Sunday in the age of 81. Karol Modzelewski was a historian and dissident, imprisoned for 8 years for his political beliefs during Communist times. He was always fighting for democratic Poland. But – he was not satisfied with changes after 1989. He claimed that Poland regained freedom, but it forgot about equality and brotherhood. Poland over 25 years of democratic transformation has reached the stage when liberal democracy stopped to meet expectations of the whole society. In his opinion vulnerable and neglected people started to regard democracy as a machinery which is hiding the conspiracy of elites. One of the reasons was not delivering justice to all of them. Such distrust of a huge part of the Polish society (approximately 1/3) opened the way for populist narrative and attack on democratic and rule of law institutions in 2015. This attack is still ongoing. The ruling party is trying to create – as Karol Modzelewski framed it – “police state” with different instruments allowing to stay in power and controlling citizens. Currently the judicial independence is at stake.

As the Ombudsman I try to do everything what is possible in order to save rule of law in my country. I know that rule of law is not a zero-one game. Rule of Law Index by World Justice Project is a great tool to explain to the public opinion that the change is not happening overnight. States may slide into authoritarian rule as a result of series of actions, which are

not even noticeable by citizens on a daily basis. But after a few years you are waking up in a completely different country. That is the reason why you have to be cautious almost every day. But you must also respond to needs of society, that rule of law guarantees should be of value for everybody. My office tries to show its importance to citizens by regular visits in different regions of Poland, by litigation of numerous cases, by submission of hundreds of interventions and recommendations.

I think that this distinction is an important recognition for all rule of law defenders in Poland - the Ombudsman is just one of them. I treat this award as the solidarity of whole global rule of law community not only with myself, but with all those who fight in Poland for freedom, human rights and rule of law: civil society, members of academia, judges, prosecutors, attorneys. I do believe that thanks to intensive work and international solidarity we will be able to overcome the current serious crisis. If we succeed, our experience will be of great value for other countries and institutions facing similar attacks on judicial independence and constitutional order.

This recognition is not only for myself, but for the whole Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights. I am just the seventh Ombudsman. I am like a captain of a big ship. When I will step down in September 2020, this 300-staff ship will continue its cruise with such a great people like my deputy – Mr. Stanislaw Trociuk, a navigator of this office. Mr. Trociuk started his career 30 years ago as an assistant to first Ombudsman – Professor Ewa Łętowska. He was deputy ombudsman of four last ombudspersons. He is a great legal mind, with many successes achieved over years, including over 100 victories before the Polish Constitutional Court. For last four years we are like “brothers in arms” in our fight for rule of law in Poland.

Mr. Trociuk, the floor is yours.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

On behalf of the employees of the Ombudsman Office of Poland I would like to express sincere thanks for this honorable distinction. The distinction is a sign that we do our job successfully, but it is also a sign that in Poland the rule of law and the protection of human rights are in

crisis. It is only in crisis situations that the defenders of these values come to the fore. They are then perceived and arouse interest.

In our work we follow the principle developed by professor Ewa Łętowska, first Polish Ombudsman.

She said that every Ombudsman who wants to do his job well, must first and foremost resist the authorities and as strong and loud as possible. Sometimes he loses, sometimes he wins - like in life. However, the Ombudsman "understanding the situation" and liked by government would be a denial of his own sense.

Happy persons do not turn to Ombudsman. Our work usually involves encountering human harm and attempting to repair it. Bringing help to others gives satisfaction. This satisfaction is doubled if, as today, our work is noticed and appreciated.

Once again, on behalf of the employees of the Ombudsman Office in Poland, thank you for granted award.